

THE BLIND

Gabriel Farrell

Hv1593
F247



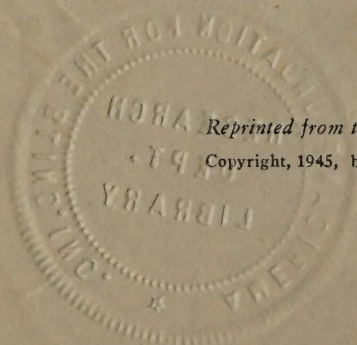
AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

HV1593 C.2
F 247
Cop. 2

The Blind

GABRIEL FARRELL





Reprinted from the SOCIAL WORK YEAR BOOK, 1945

Copyright, 1945, by RUSSELL SAGE FOUNDATION

The Blind

THE BLIND. The extent of blindness in the United States is not accurately known, partly because of faulty enumeration but chiefly due to difficulty in defining who is to be classified as blind. A standard definition of blindness recently adopted declares that a person shall be considered blind who has "visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with proper correction, or a limitation in the fields of vision such that the widest diameter of visual field subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees."² Since only a relatively small number of persons with defective sight have had actual visual tests, the number of blind persons in the United States, in terms of that definition, is not definitely known.

From 1830 to 1930 the Bureau of the Census, United States Department of Commerce, reported the number, ages, and so forth, of blind people discovered; but the data proved to be so incomplete and unrepresentative of the total blind population that the item on blindness was omitted from the 1940 census. The last census of the blind, that of 1930, listed 63,489 blind persons. The National Health Survey, made in 1935-1936, gave an estimate of 107,000 blind persons in the United States, not including 10,000 living in institutions. A study made in 1943 applied the rates made in this Survey to the total population of 1940, as given by the census, and states that an estimate of more than 121,000 blind persons is thus obtained.³ The same rates give an estimated 126,000 for 1942. The author of the study maintains that these estimates are too low and concludes that the aggregate number of blind in the United States in 1940 may have been approximately 215,000 to 240,000. An unpublished estimate recently made by Ralph G. Hurlin, director of the Department of Statistics of the Russell Sage Foundation, places the number of the blind at approximately 230,000. This estimate has been adopted by many as the best approximation of the number of the blind in this country.

The National Health Survey enumeration reported the following percentage distribution

by age groups: under twenty-five years of age, 5.8 per cent; ages twenty-five to forty-nine, 17.3 per cent; ages fifty to seventy-four, 47.2 per cent; and age seventy-five and over, 29.7 per cent. Thus blindness in the United States is seen to be predominately an old age problem. The Survey also states that blindness is most prevalent among the groups least favored economically. It cites the high rate of relief found among the blind, pointing out that in the winter of 1935-1936 nearly one-third of the blind were in families on relief and another third were in families not on relief but with annual incomes of less than \$1,000. Less than 3 per cent had annual incomes of \$3,000 or more. These economic factors, however, have since changed considerably, as evidenced by the continued drop in the number of recipients of aid to the blind under Title X of the Social Security Act, discussed later.

From the above estimates it will be noted that at least one person, and perhaps two, in every thousand in this country is blind. While blindness may not be as extensive in the United States as in other countries, this ratio of non-sighted to sighted people is too large in view of the possibilities of prevention and the increasing opportunities for restoration of vision.

Causes of Blindness

Causes of blindness are also difficult to state accurately, because of inadequate records. In an authoritative study¹ published in 1934 the percentage distribution of blindness according to cause is reported as follows: disease, 54.4 per cent; accident or other injury, 16.5 per cent; other definitely reported causes, 2.6 per cent; and causes indefinitely or inaccurately reported, 25.5 per cent. In the first classification, cataract, glaucoma, atrophy of the optic nerve, ophthalmia neonatorum, and trachoma rank highest, in the order given, as specific affections of the eye. Several general diseases—namely measles, meningitis, and scarlet fever—are also identified as causes of considerable blindness.

¹ See Best, *infra cit.*

More recent and perhaps more accurate classifications are those issued by the Committee on Statistics of the Blind¹ from reports received from 44 residential schools and day school classes in nine cities, covering 4,604 pupils during the school year 1941-1942. These data are cross-classified by etiology and by type and site of eye affections, according to a standard classification developed by the Committee. Causes by percentage according to etiology are given as follows: infectious diseases, 24 per cent; trauma, 7.7 per cent; poisonings, 0.1 per cent; neoplasms, 2.8 per cent; general diseases, 1.4 per cent; prenatal origin, 52.4 per cent; etiology undetermined or not specified, 11.6 per cent. Causes classified by type and site of infection are: eyeball, 32.6 per cent (including glaucoma, myopia, buphthalmos, and structural anomalies); conjunctiva, 0.1 per cent; cornea, 11.7 per cent (including keratitis, ulceration, and other affections); iris and ciliary body, 6.9 per cent (including iritis and sympathetic ophthalmitis); crystalline lens, 16.3 per cent (chiefly cataract); choroid and retina, 12 per cent (including choroiditis, detached retina, and retinal hemorrhage); optic nerve and cortical visual centers, 16.9 per cent (including optic nerve atrophy and retrobulbar and intracranial lesions); vitreous, 1 per cent; and miscellaneous and ill-defined, 3.5 per cent.

A report by the Social Security Board, indicating the results of a study of eye examination records in 20 of the states administering aid to the blind, is now in preparation.

For a discussion of activities carried on in the field of blindness prevention, see SIGHT CONSERVATION.

Educational Provisions for the Blind

The first turn from the giving of alms to institutional care, with an educational objective, occurred in Paris in 1784. Valentin Häuy, moved by the derision directed at blind musicians in a cafe, founded a school for the blind and developed an embossed type for their in-

struction. From this beginning there developed a new attitude, namely, that the blind could be taught and were entitled to that opportunity.

Interest in the blind in America stems from this changed attitude toward the sightless in France. Dr. John D. Fisher, a young Boston physician, came in contact with the school of Häuy in Paris in 1826 and resolved to develop a similar program for the blind in his own country. He enlisted a group of friends and secured from the Massachusetts Legislature, in 1829, a charter to form a school which, after a succession of names, is now the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind. At about the same time, interest in the blind stirred in other parts of the country and schools were opened in New York and in Philadelphia. From the pioneer work of these three schools, interest in the blind reached out until today there is opportunity for every blind child in America to secure an education comparable to that open to seeing boys and girls.

There are now 58 residential schools for the blind, and 22 cities provide Braille classes in the public schools. These educational opportunities usually begin at the kindergarten level and continue through high school. In some states, pupils are sent to nearby high schools for instruction in the upper grades, the blind school providing residence, books, appliances, and tutorial assistance. The same situation sometimes applies to students attending college, but preferably arrangements are made so that blind students may live at colleges independent of schools for the blind. The ablest blind students continue on to professional schools. To do this successfully, special reading service is needed since many texts are not available in Braille. Sixteen states provide state funds for the payment of readers, and there are a number of scholarships available to help students. No figures are available regarding the number of blind students in colleges and universities. Enrollment in the 58 residential schools and the Braille classes in the 22 cities as of January 1, 1944, was something under six thousand. About 500 of these students were in the Braille classes. The enrollment for 1944 is

¹ Organized in 1933 by the American Foundation for the Blind and the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness.

much lower than that of the preceding year, due partly to the declining rate in all schools but chiefly to the fact that many older boys and girls have left school to enter war industries.

The chief philanthropic concern for the blind until recently has been to provide an adequate education on the theory that with good training young blind people would find suitable occupations in their home communities. To supplement individual effort, a few shops especially for blind adults were opened. Organizations supported by private philanthropy were established, such as one in Massachusetts whose name, The Massachusetts Association for Promoting the Interests of the Adult Blind, implies the attitude of many. Individual cases of need were helped, however; assistance was given to those wishing to get started in business; and, in some degree, medical and eye care were provided. Many of these organizations attracted the interest of philanthropic people who contributed to their support.

Governmental Provision for the Blind

While legislative provision for blind assistance from public funds was made in Indiana in 1840, in New York City in 1866, and in Ohio in 1896, all of these laws were later repealed and it was not until after 1900 that large organized public programs for the blind, beyond those of education, really got under way. The oldest state law providing aid which has been in continuous existence is that which was enacted in Illinois in 1903. In 1907 Massachusetts established the first state commission for the blind. Now nearly every state maintains an agency to assist blind adults or makes provision for assistance through some state department. While the first commissions were separate entities, now most of them are divisions of the departments of welfare or education. In the earlier days the objective was to assist blind persons to use their training in industry, private enterprise, or sheltered workshops supported by the state or voluntary organizations. Assistance from public funds was given to newly blinded persons. Home teach-

ers and home industries, with outlets through sales, were introduced. Registers were established to list all blind persons in the respective states. All of these programs were originally financed by the states, supplemented by voluntary organizations.

The first federal funds appropriated especially for the blind were made available in 1879, when \$10,000 annually was designated to the American Printing House for the Blind to provide books for schools for the blind. This amount has been increased from time to time until the American Printing House now has an annual federal appropriation of \$125,000. Its program has been extended to include the preparation of appliances and "talking book" apparatus and records. From funds other than those provided by the federal government the American Printing House publishes 15 Braille periodicals, including the Braille edition of a popular magazine.

In 1931 the Pratt-Smoot Bill made federal funds available to provide reading matter for the adult blind through the Library of Congress. This legislation was later amended to include the production of "talking book" records. In June, 1944, the appropriation was increased to \$500,000 a year and broadened so that "talking book" machines can be provided and kept in repair through federal funds. The original "books," pioneered by the American Foundation for the Blind, were provided through Work Projects Administration funds. Today the records are processed by the Foundation and the American Printing House for the Blind, and embossed books, provided under this Act, are made by five printing houses for the blind in this country. Both "talking book" records and embossed books are distributed postage free to the adult blind through 27 regional libraries.

The outstanding piece of federal legislation affecting the blind is the Social Security Act, enacted in 1935. Title X of this Act provides a matching of federal funds with state funds for financial aid to needy blind persons. *See PUBLIC ASSISTANCE*. The immediate effect of this legislation was to enlarge the work of state commissions for the blind and also to bring

into being state agencies where they had not previously existed. Aid to the blind under this program, as reported for June, 1944, was received by 73,883 individuals in an amount totaling \$2,125,645. The average payment for the month was \$28.77. (These figures include Missouri, Nevada, and Pennsylvania, states which carry on programs for the blind without federal participation. Delaware and Alaska do not administer aid to the blind.) In evaluating the number of recipients it must be recalled that to receive money under the Social Security Act a person has to be classified as needy; and also that in many states blind persons, upon reaching the age of sixty-five years, are transferred to the old age assistance program.

In 1936 the Randolph-Sheppard Act authorized the opening of vending stands in public buildings for the sale of newspapers, periodicals, confections, and tobacco products, by licensed blind persons. The Act has been administered through the Office of Education in the Federal Security Agency. Legislation is now being prepared to transfer this program to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, created under the Barden-LaFollette Act of 1943, and located in the Federal Security Agency. In 1938 the Wagner-O'Day Act was passed, requiring federal departments to buy certain needed supplies such as brooms, mops, pillowcases, and so forth, from workshops for the blind, at a fair market price. This brought a great deal of business to established workshops for the blind. The war has tremendously increased this opportunity for work. In the past year 56 non-profit workshops for the blind, located in 32 states, have participated in government business in the amount of \$10,000,000, and blind workmen engaged in manufacturing these products have received over \$1,000,000 in wages. One workshop received the Army-Navy "E" award for meritorious service and two other shops received the Maritime "M" for excellence of work in behalf of the merchant marine.

During the year 1943 two important pieces of legislation, which included blindness with other forms of disability, were enacted. The Clark-Walsh Act authorized the Veterans Ad-

ministration to set up a program for the rehabilitation of disabled veterans. The Barden-LaFollette Act extended the provisions of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1920. Little had been done for the blind under the Act of 1920, but the Barden-LaFollette Act offers greatly enlarged opportunity for federal assistance to the blind. The federal government will now reimburse any state for 50 per cent of its expenditures for "any service necessary to render a disabled individual fit to engage in a remunerative occupation." Rehabilitative training and medical examinations will be provided to all employable handicapped individuals. Medical and surgical care, hospitalization, prosthetic devices, maintenance while in training, and transportation will be provided for those who pass a means test. In addition, the federal government will reimburse the states for expenditures incurred in the administration of the program. These may include the salary and travel of vocational counselors and placement agents. The law definitely states that that part of the program pertaining to the blind shall be administered by existing state agencies for the blind. Such a state agency must prepare a plan, which is presented to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for approval; and after approval its administration will be vested in the state agency. An amendment was attached to the last income tax law which permits blind persons to deduct up to \$500 for special services needed by the blind. *See VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION.*

The war has offered unusual opportunities to the blind. During the past year the unique situation has existed of employers actually advertising for blind workers; and in one city — Brooklyn — the agencies for the blind stated that there was not an employable blind person in the community who was not at work. War has brought to the blind a new economic parity with seeing people.

Care of the War-Blinded

Although the Clark-Walsh Act vests authority for the rehabilitation of disabled soldiers and sailors in the Veterans Administra-

tion the program is not working out exactly that way in so far as the blind are concerned. In view of the fact that the first approach to the newly blinded person must be made before his hospitalization is complete, and therefore before he is discharged from the Army or Navy and becomes eligible for benefits under the Veterans Administration, it was agreed in December, 1943, that the Army would establish a center for personal and social readjustment, adjacent to a general hospital. The hospital designated was the Valley Forge General Hospital in Phoenixville, Pa. Also a small number of blinded cases were admitted to the Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco, but later transferred to Dibble General Hospital, Palo Alto, Calif. The Navy began to send its blinded men to the Naval Hospital in Philadelphia. In all of these centers, preliminary programs for retraining blinded personnel were set up. In July, 1944, a center for the retraining of blinded servicemen was opened at a former boys' school in Avon, Conn., and designated as Old Farms Convalescent Hospital. A staff has been assembled and facilities planned for 200 men. In March, 1944, the Secretary of War stated that there had been 75 cases of blindness up to that time—70 from the Army, 3 from the Navy, and 2 German prisoners. An unofficial estimate made in September, 1944, indicated that there were at that time 250 blinded servicemen.

As soon as the men at these centers are sufficiently adjusted to be able to take specialized training or to be returned to their homes, they will be discharged from the Army or Navy and come under the direction of the Veterans Administration. The Veterans Administration does not plan to set up a special training center. Men received from the centers will be placed out for retraining in already existing institutions such as special schools or colleges, or in shops for the blind, or under the direction of organizations having helpful programs. Veterans' pensions for blindness range

from \$80 a month, for 20/200 vision, to \$175 for total blindness. These sums are increased for additional disabilities. See SERVICEMEN AND VETERANS.

Bibliography

- American Association of Instructors of the Blind. *Proceedings*. Biennially.
- American Association of Workers for the Blind. *Proceedings*. Biennially.
- American Foundation for the Blind
- Hayes, Samuel P. *Contributions to a Psychology of Blindness*. 296 pp. 1941. Includes bibliographies.
- Lende, Helga. comp.
- Books About the Blind: A Bibliographical Guide to Literature Relating to the Blind*. 215 pp. 1940.
- Directory of Activities for the Blind in the United States and Canada*. 149 pp. 1943.
- What of the Blind?* 2 vols. 1938 and 1941. Includes bibliographies.
- Outlook for the Blind and the Teachers Forum*. 10 issues yearly.
- Greear, James N., Jr. "Rehabilitation of the War-Blinded Soldiers." May 1944.
- Kerby, C. Edith. "Eye Conditions Among Pupils in Schools for the Blind in the United States, 1941-42: A Report for the Committee on Statistics of the Blind." November 1943. Ninth annual summary and analysis of data on causes of blindness.
- "Rehabilitation of the Blind in Army Hospitals." September 1943.
- Wilber, Louise. *Vocations for the Visually Handicapped*. 224 pp. 1937. Includes a bibliography.
- Berens, Conrad and others. "The Causes of Blindness in Children: Their Relation to Preventive Ophthalmology," in *Journal of the American Medical Association*. December 14, 1935.
- Best, Harry. *Blindness and the Blind in the United States*. 714 pp. 1934.
- Farrell, Gabriel
- "For Those in Darkness," in *Survey Midmonthly*. June 1943.
- "Help for the Blinded Soldier," in *Hygeia*. April 1944.
- Kerby, C. Edith. *Manual on the Use of the Standard Classification of Causes of Blindness*. 26 pp. Published for the Committee on Statistics of the Blind by the American Foundation for the Blind and the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness. 1940.
- Lowenfeld, Berthold and McKay, Evelyn C. "Enrollment of Blind Pupils in the United States," in *Journal of Educational Sociology*. February 1944.
- Sanders, Barkev S. "The Blind—Their Number and Characteristics," in *Social Security Bulletin*. October 1943.

HV1593

c. 2

F 247

Farrell, Gabriel

THE BLIND.

Date Due

HV1593

c. 2

F 247

Farrell, Gabriel

AUTHOR

THE BLIND.

TITLE

DATE
LOANED

BORROWER'S NAME

PAMPHLET BINDERS

This is No. 1525

also carried in stock in the following sizes

HIGH	WIDE	THICKNESS	HIGH	WIDE	THICKNESS
1523 9 inches	7 inches	$\frac{1}{2}$ inch	1529 12 inches	10 inches	$\frac{1}{2}$ inch
1524 10 "	7 "	"	1530 12 "	9 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	"
1525 9 "	6 "	"	1532 13 "	10 "	"
1526 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	7 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	"	1533 14 "	11 "	"
1527 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	7 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	"	1534 15 "	12 "	"
1528 11 "	8 "	"			

Other sizes made to order.

MANUFACTURED BY

LIBRARY BUREAU

Division of REMINGTON RAND INC.

Library Supplies of all kinds

